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Letter dated 4 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to bring to your attention a statement issued on 31 March 2000 by the Presidency of the European Union on behalf of the Union on the Independence Day March held in Minsk on 25 March 2000 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a General Assembly document, under agenda item 116 (b).

(*Signed*) António **Monteiro**
Permanent Representative of Portugal
to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 4 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and French]

Statement on the Independence Day March held in Minsk on 25 March 2000 by the Presidency of the European Union on behalf of the European Union

The European Union deplores the unprovoked and disproportionate use of force by Belarusian authorities to suppress a march organized by the opposition in Minsk on 25 March, considering in particular the peaceful and orderly character of the last one, held on 15 March.

The European Union deeply regrets the random arrests made by the security forces on that day, involving Belarusian bystanders, march participants and journalists, as well as foreign observers, including a diplomat, a Member of Parliament and foreign press representatives.

The European Union underlines that such events reflect a deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus.

On these grounds, the European Union calls upon the Belarusian authorities to release without delay, and to drop charges against, any people arrested by security forces in connection with the march who might still be detained, including those who have already been sentenced.

At the same time, the Belarusian authorities are called upon to investigate thoroughly the mishandling of the march, notably reports that some people were detained before the march and that some detainees were subsequently beaten.

In this context, the European Union calls upon the Belarusian authorities to drop charges against Mr. Lebedko, Mr. Ivachekevich and Mr. Belenki. The European Union reminds Belarusian authorities of its previous similar requests regarding the involvement of opposition representatives in Freedom March I in October 1999, such as Mr. Statkevich and Mr. Shchukin.

The European Union calls upon Belarusian authorities to lift the ban on all demonstrations. The ban represents an unjustified restriction of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association of Belarusian citizens.

Such developments are a matter of grave concern and a setback to building a climate of trust in the framework of the dialogue process. The European Union reminds the Belarusian authorities that human rights and the establishment of a real political dialogue are important elements of its benchmark policy towards Belarus.

The European Union would also like to remind the Belarusian authorities that the Istanbul Declaration of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was signed by Belarus, emphasized that only a real political dialogue in Belarus can pave the way for free and democratic elections, through which the foundations for real democracy can be developed. The European Union hopes that the Belarusian authorities will follow this path.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, align themselves with the present statement.